

## Professor Stauffer

### Grading Guidelines

Grading student essays is an art, not a science. It is impossible to specify in precise terms what separates an excellent essay from one that is merely good. Nevertheless, your essays will be graded on the basis of the following criteria:

1. Clarity and precision of expression. *The quality of your writing will matter!*
2. Thoroughness, coherence, and depth of analysis.
3. Thoughtfulness, originality, and care in composition.

### Ten Writing Tips (a.k.a., “The Ten Commandments of Writing”)

1. Go back and reread the relevant sections of the text on which you are writing; spend some considerable time thinking and organizing your thoughts before you start writing. I am not looking for “right answers,” but for papers that really engage with the topics and show that you have put some real thought into your work. You do not have to agree with interpretations I have offered in class. The best papers often do not.
2. Work very hard on an outline or on some other way of putting your thoughts down on paper before you start writing. Do not just start writing. But do not be too constricted by the standard outline form.
3. Make sure that you develop your points as fully as possible. The most common vice of student writing is inadequate explanation and development. Bear in mind that good explanations often require providing some textual context.
4. Clarity is the first principle of good essay writing. Never obfuscate your points by adding complexity for complexity’s sake; always express yourself as clearly as possible; and do not try to dazzle your reader with fancy words and elaborate formulations. Aim for *simplicity without simplification*. In other words, each expression should be as complex, but *only* as complex, as it needs to be to say precisely what you mean.
5. Think of paragraphs as the basic building blocks of your paper. Use paragraphs to develop a single line of reflection or a set of closely connected points.
6. Use semi-colons correctly or do not use them at all. Review the basic rule of correct semi-colon usage.
7. *Proofread very carefully.*
8. Get outside your own head and into the head of your reader. How would your writing sound to you if you had not written it? It helps to read your writing aloud to yourself.
9. Write as a judge, not as a lawyer, especially when critiquing a position. In other words, give the other side its due; you do not want to come across as a biased advocate.
10. Read Strunk and White’s *The Elements of Style*. It does not contain all that you need to know, but you need to know all that it contains.

**Bonus Tip #11:** Embrace writing as a painful but wonderful process!